

HR Insights



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Preparing HR for Future Health Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic was a wake-up call for HR departments in 2020. Suddenly, employees were looking to HR teams for guidance in areas not typically considered their responsibility. This was a turning point for many workplaces—now, HR is expected to understand public health challenges swiftly and manage them efficiently.

This article outlines four ways HR teams can prepare for future public health crises. Employers should use this information to help cope with the current COVID-19 pandemic fallout and beyond.

1. Assessing the Risk

One of the first steps during a public health crisis is to assess the risk of the organization. To do this, employers must educate themselves about the crisis in general. This means staying updated on federal and local health guidance to help inform organizational strategies.

While workplace risk assessments will vary during a health crisis, all employers will need to consider the impact on workers. Are they at a heightened risk by being in the workplace during this crisis? What safety protocols will keep employees safe? An assessment should answer these questions and help employers prepare to make informed choices in response to the crisis.

2. Adapting Quickly

Based on the risk assessment, employers must be prepared to adapt quickly to the health crisis. For instance, if employees are at high risk due to their working conditions, perhaps requiring them to work remotely would be the best solution. Employers must ensure safeguards are in place so that employees don't need to choose between their jobs and their health.

3. Communicating Thoroughly

At every stage, employers should keep employees in the loop. This means sharing the outcome of the risk assessment and clearly communicating any new workplace protocols. Employees should never have to wonder how their workplace is handling a crisis.

4. Welcoming Change

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, it took far too long for some businesses to adapt. Many pushed back on requiring employees to work remotely, only to reverse course later. Employers should be ready to make these decisions swiftly, and must embrace the changing landscape. This might mean having some employees work remotely while others remain in the workplace. Employers should think about such contingencies and be prepared to follow through if a public health crisis necessitates it.

Summary

Responding to a health crisis will be much easier when an employer plans for such an event ahead of time. Reach out for more workplace guidance to help in this effort.

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